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Medieval Wood Sculpture of an Unknown Saint from Nousiainen: from Materials to Meaning

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Introduction

The focus of this article is a polychrome wood sculpture from Nousiainen (Sw. Nousis) church in Southwestern Finland, technically labelled an *Unknown Saint* (ID H2073:3) (Fig. 1 a–d.). The sculpture, at present, is on display at the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki, and has been dated on stylistic grounds to 1270s.[1] It last received scholarly attention during the 1960s when Finnish art historian Carl Axel Nordman (1892–1972) suggested that the sculpture depicted the Virgin Mary or a female saint. He placed it in the context of 'French Gothic style' and 'monumental sculpture' and connected it to the early phases of the construction of Uppsala Cathedral.[2] The identity and origin of this sculpture had already been discussed by Nordman (1932), and about one decade later by art historian Olga Alice Nygren (1898–1981) who, however, merely focused on the iconographical interpretation of the sculpture – she proposed that the saint was *John the Evangelist*.[3] Much later, in 1968, the *Unknown Saint* was exhibited in Paris as an *Unknown Male Saint* (Saint Inconnu) together with three sculptures from the same collection.[4] Nevertheless, no consensus on the identity of the depicted saint has been achieved until the present day.

The aim of this article is to present a research project and its results focusing on reassessing earlier interpretations of the identity and origin of the *Unknown Saint*. Second, our purpose is to discuss the meaning and function of the sculpture in the context of the cult of saints and the veneration of the relics. In general, historical documents concerning acquisition and the use of sa-

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[1] On the dating of the *Unknown Saint,* see Carl Axel Nordman, *Medeltida skulptur i Finland* (Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja, 62), Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys: Helsinki 1965, 92–93; Creative Commons-licensed (CC BY 4.0) photos of the sculpture are available on Finna.fi search service, https://www.finna.fi/Record/musketti.M012:H2073:3 (accessed 26 January 2018).

[2] Nordman 1965, 89–93.

[3] Carl Axel Nordman, *Några träskulpturer från äldre medeltid i Egentliga Finland*. (Särtryck ur Svenska Litteratursällskapets Historiska och Litteraturhistoriska studier, 8), Helsingfors 1932, 9–33, at 15–17; Olga Alice Nygren, *Helgonen i Finlands medeltidskonst* (Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja, XLVI), Suomen muinaismuistoyhdistys: Helsinki 1945, 1–230, at 57.

[4] *L'Europe gothique: XIIe XIVe siècles*, guide sommaire, 12e exposition européenne d'art organisée par le Gouvernement français à l'initiative et sous les auspices du Conseil de l'Europe, Musée national du Louvre, Pavillon de Flore: Paris 1968, 60, nr. 97 (*Saint Inconnu*).

Figure 1 a.

Figure 1 b.

Figures 1 a-d.
The *Unknown Saint* (137 x 32 x 20 cm). National Museum of Finland, Helsinki. Photos: Ilari Järvinen, National Board of Antiquities.

cral art and objects in Finland during the Middle Ages are scarce and this also concerns the sculpture under scrutiny. Therefore, the sculpture itself forms the primary source of the study.

The research started with documentation emphasizing the present form. The sculpture was analysed using some of the traditional methods of art history, such as visual observation, iconographical analysis, and comparative style analysis supported by digital photography. Additionally, technical research methods were applied to study materials and techniques used in the manufacture of the sculpture, and to form a picture of its conservation history.

However, the course of the research changed after a finding made in the archives: radiographs of the sculpture taken during the 1990s showed that there was a metal object of irregular form inside a drilled hole in the head. The plug closing the hole could not be removed safely, that is without

Figure 1 c.

Figure 1 d.

damaging the head of the sculpture (Fig. 2 a).[5] To gain further information of the form and material of the hidden object as well as of the 'softer' or less reflecting materials that seemed to be layered at the bottom of the hole, a computed tomography (CT) scanning with two scanning protocols, a dual-energy CT (DECT) imaging and an ultra-high resolution CT scanning protocol, was performed in collaboration with the (HUS) Helsinki University Hospital Medical Imaging Center.[6] This scanning was a pioneering effort in Finland – it gave the opportunity to explore a non-invasive method

[5] A brief survey of the practices of examining assumed relics in plug holes was undertaken. E.g. at the Berliner Skulpturensammlung in Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the findings in the head of an enthroned Virgin *Mary and child* (ID 8027) were left intact after the X-ray examination of the sculpture. However, in the case of another sculpture of *Virgin Mary and child* (ID 8323) the plug of the head was easily removed, and the relics and *cedulae* under it examined. E-mail correspondence between Tobias Kunz und Katri Vuola, 10 and 16 February 2016. See the descriptions of the sculptures and the relics in Tobias Kunz ed., *Bildwerke Nördlich der Alpen 1050 bis 1380. Kritischer Bestandskatalog,* Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Michael Imhof Verlag: Petersburg 2014, 270–80, 379–87. A radiograph of the head of the Enthroned Virgin is at 386.

[6] The CT-scanning took place 24 January 2017. On the method of computed tomography scanning, see e.g. Pallipedia. The Free Online Palliative Care Dictionary, http://pallipedia.org/computed-tomography-ct-cat-scanning/ (accessed 26 January 2018).

Figure 2. a.
The wooden plug enclosing the hole of the head. The damaged rim of the hole may have been caused by an attempt to remove the plug. Photo: Ilari Järvinen, National Board of Antiquities.

Figure 2. b.
As the photo from the base shows, the sculpture's body has been put together from two blocks of wood. Photo: Ilari Järvinen, National Board of Antiquities.

for the technical research of a polychromed wooden sculpture and its structure, with an equipment normally designed and used for medical purposes – the sculpture conveniently corresponds to the size of a human being.[7] The focus of the research was on the content of the head, because – on the basis of similar cases described in research literature, the findings in the hole could indicate a relic or relics placed in the head – the hypothesis was that there could be some small parts of bone or soft tissue placed under the plug. New research questions were raised during the project, such as how would these relics affect the ontological meaning of the sculpture, and did the sculpture gain special veneration in the context of the cult of saints in the region?

The practice of placing relics inside sculptures during the Middle Ages is long known and even today a part of the living Catholic culture. Moreover, the interest in saints and relics has increased considerably during the past decade, also among art historians.[8] This applies to the Finnish scholar-

[7] CT-scanning has, however, been used outside of Finland in examining medieval polychrome sculptures. See e.g. Pia Ehasalu, Krista Andreson, Krista & Signe Vahur, 'Kolga-Jaani krutsifiks, uuringud ja tõlgendused' (Crucifix of Kolga-Jaani, research and interpretations), in Helen Tarvis & Heige Peets eds., *Renovatum*, Anno 2012, Ennistuskoda Kanut: Tallinn 2012–2013, 21–33, at 18, 21–22. www.kanut.ee/Renovatum/Anno_2012/pdf/renovatum_2012_a.pdf (accessed 26 January 2018); Bettina Ebert, 'Composite Wainstock Block Construction in Medieval Sculptures: A Question of Quality?', in ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017, ed. J. Bridgland, International Council of Museums: Paris 2017, art. 1703; for an example of using a CT-scanner in an artistic project, see Saara Ekström, *Rosario (The woodcarvers tears*), 2011, http://www.saaraekstrom.com/video/02_rosario/index.html (accessed 26 January 2018). In this project a polychrome wooden sculpture of the *Virgin Mary* (Rusko) from the Turku Museum Center collection was CT-scanned at Turku University Hospital.

[8] See e.g. Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204,* The Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania 2012; Annika Elisabeth Fisher, 'Cross Altar and Crucifix in Ottonian Cologne. Past Narrative, Present Ritual, Future Resurrection', in Søren Kaspersen & Erik Thunø eds., *Decorating the Lord's Table. On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, Museum Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen 2006, 43–62; *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, Martina Bagnoli et al. eds. (Research Publication 195), The British Museum: London 2014.

ly scene as well.[9] Yet in Finland, the relation between relics and sculpture during the Middle Ages is less recognized and researched – the findings in the Nousiainen sculpture would be the first of its kind here.

As mentioned, the research process began as an inventory and documentation of the outer form of the *Unknown Saint*, but expanded to a multidisciplinary research project focusing on the 'inner space' of this art piece. The project was led by Katri Vuola and carried out by a team of specialists from different fields and organizations. Therefore, the article is composed of the texts written by the members of the research team. To start with, art historian Katri Vuola describes the present, outer form of the sculpture, while research conservator Henni Reijonen (The National Museum of Finland) analyses its structure and the colours and discusses the consequences of the earlier conservations on the visual appearance of the sculpture. In the following chapter, medical physicist Touko Kaasalainen (Helsinki University Hospital) describes the CT-scanning process from the technical point of view and together with radiologist Riste Saat (Helsinki University Hospital) interprets the finding in the head on the basis of radiographs. This part is followed by the two last chapters in which the iconography is analysed by Katri Vuola, who also discusses the function and the meaning of the Nousiainen sculpture in the context of enclosing relics in sculptures.

The *Unknown Saint* from Nousiainen – form, construction and the history of conservation

The sculpture of the *Unknown Saint* is almost a life-size figure which stands on a small pedestal, and has an elongated, column-like body with a proportionally small head.[10] Movement towards the beholder is expressed through minor details, such as the right foot, which is slightly forward, the right arm, which is slightly uplifted, and the head, which is bent forward. The oval-shaped face once painted a flesh colour has a high forehead, the triangle-shaped eyes are wide open, the nose is narrow (the tip has been broken off) and the chin is slender (Fig. 3).[11] The damage on the nose may have been caused by a sharp tool or a weapon. The small, slightly open mouth has traces of red. The forms of the eyes are carved and there are traces of red lining in the inner corners of the eyes.

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[9] See e.g. Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, Markku J. Oinonen & Göran Possnert, 'The Turku Cathedral Relics Revisited and Anonymous Relics Dated to the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Mirator* 16:2 (2015), 308–22, at 314; Visa Immonen & Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, 'Finger of a Saint, Thumb of a Priest: Medieval Relics in the Diocese of Turku, and the Archaeology of Lived Bodies', in Tor Ahlbäck & Björn Dahla eds., *Religion and the Body: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Religion and the Body Held at Åbo, Finland, on 16–18 June 2010* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 23), Donner Institute of Research in Religious and Cultural History: Åbo 2011, 141–73; Sofia Lahti, 'Helig hand med världslig prestige: Ett martyrsrelikvarium med ett donatorsvapen', *Taidehistoria tieteenä – Konsthistorien som vetenskap Tahiti* (02/2015); Sofia Lahti, *Silver Arms and Silk Heads: Medieval reliquaries in the Nordic Countries*, Doctoral dissertation, Åbo Akademi (forthcoming); Sofia Lahti, 'Capse pro reliquiis: Turun tuomiokirkon reliikit ja relikvaariot', *Mirator*(November 2003), 1–18; Aki Arponen, 'Turun tuomiokirkon pyhäinjäännökset aikojen saatossa', in Meri Heinonen & Marika Räsänen eds., *Pohjoinen reformaatio*, Turku Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies & Turun historiallinen yhdistys: Turku 2016, 249–53; Marika Räsänen, *Thomas Aquinas's Relics as Focus for Conflict and Cult in the Late Middle Ages: The Restless Corpse* (Crossing Boundaries, 6), Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam 2017.

[10] Maximum dimensions (approx.): 137 cm (height), 32 cm (width), and 20 cm (depth).

[11] Similar kind of damaged noses can be observed on the fourteenth-century wooden sculpture of *Virgin Mary and child* from the same church (Nousiainen) (ID H2073:1).

Figure 3.
There are fragments of colour on the recesses of the face of the "*Unknown Saint*". The damage on the nose may have been caused by a sharp tool or a weapon. Photo: Katri Vuola.

Figure 4.
The protruding fold of drapery is carved separately and attached with large size iron nails. Under the red colour there is a layer of rag paper. Photo: Katri Vuola.

The hands which were carved of separate pieces of wood are missing together with their gestures and the attributes they were holding – a commonly occurring damage on wooden sculptures that complicates or hinders recognition of the identity represented. The figure wears a long, leafed dress (with traces of yellowish ochre) girded by a narrow belt. The end of the belt on the waist hangs slightly on the left side of the body. The tunic has a v-shaped neckline. The mantle with fragments of red colour leaves the right shoulder uncovered. The strap of the mantle carved in low relief spans across the upper part of the flat chest. The mantle forms U- or V-shaped folds on the right side of the lower part of the body and it is gathered under the left arm (stump) where it hangs down in tube-like folds. Pointed shoes peek out under the hem of the dress. The headwear, most probably a crown of metal (or of wood), is missing, as well as the back half of the head (with a nimbus?) that seems to have been sawn off from the upper end of the backboard (Fig. 2 a).

The main core and the backboard of the sculpture are made of oak.[12] The main block of the sculpture was cut from a split tree trunk, which is typical for standing figures (Fig. 1 c & 2 b).[13] In this case the trunk was much wider than the volume of the finished sculpture. The backboard and the protruding fold of drapery were carved separately and attached to the figure with nails and dowels. On the right side of the figure, on the hem of the garment, there are also two wedge-shaped additional parts of another wood species, made as 'patches' (Fig. 2 b & 4). In the middle of the backboard is a large longitudinal crack following the direction across the wood grain. The vertical cracking is also clearly visible all over the figure, with varying intensity. This type of cracking is typical for a wooden construction, even when hollowed out, because wood swells and shrinks according to fluctuations in humidity.[14]

The ground and paint layers are very sparsely preserved, and therefore it is difficult to acquire an overall picture of the painted surface. There are some fragments of red, yellow and almost whitish (flesh tone) paint, which are left in recessed areas on the garment and face.[15] Under the red and yellow paint of the garment there is something that seems to be rag paper (Fig. 4).[16] The use of paper as a smoothing layer is unique in the museum's collection of medieval sculpture, and during the 1940s conservation it was considered a later addition.[17] The most common material used for this purpose during the Middle Ages was canvas (linen).[18] The appearance of paper is, however, worn and patinated, even parchment-like. Both flesh tone on the face and the red and yellow areas on the garment are clearly visible on the radiography picture (white areas), which indicates the presence of heavy metals in the paint or ground composition. X-ray fluorescence analysis of pigments revealed the presence of lead white in the flesh tone and vermilion in the red paint of the garment.

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[12] Dendrochronological analysis by Peter Klein, 9 September 1997, Universität Hamburg, Ordinariat für Holzbiologie (object H2073:3). Taidekonservoinnin arkisto, Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi (Archive of Art Conservation, National Museum of Finland, Conservation Department). No dating for the wood was ascertained in this research.

[13] Emmanuelle Mercier, 'The Artisan Carver's Materials and Practices. Studying 13th and 14th Century Mosan Sculptures', in Kate Seymour ed., *Polychrome Sculpture: Tool Marks, Construction Techniques, Decorative Practice and Artistic Tradition*, ICOM-CC Interim Meeting: Maastricht 2010, 14–26.

[14] See e.g. R. Bruce Hoadley, 'Wood as a Physical Surface for Paint Application'; Marion F. Mecklenburg, Charles S. Tumosa, & David Erhardt, 'Structural Response of Painted Wood Surfaces to Changes in Ambient Relative Humidity', both in Valerie Dorge & F. Carey Howlett eds., *Painted Wood: History and Conservation*, The Getty Conservation Institute: Los Angeles 1998, 2–16 at 11–14; 464–83.

[15] There are whitish paint fragments around the ears and eyes of the figure, red on the lips and the mantle, and yellow on the gown (both at the hem and in the right armpit). On the red areas of the mantle there seem to be a lightly painted, whitish (but yellowed) decoration.

[16] Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy analysis (*4100 ExoScan FTIR*) conducted by Jukkapekka Etäsalo and Henni Reijonen. Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi, 19 January 2016. The fibers can also be seen by microscopy (compare the parchment).

[17] Notebook by Oskari Niemi [1945–1951], 25 May 1946. Archive box labelled 'Konservointi Niemi', Konservointiarkisto (Archive of Conservation), Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi. Paper was mainly used for documents and letters, but also for the wrappings or labels of relics, see Aki Arponen, *Uhrilampaista paperiin*, Tietysti.fi, 7 January 2015. http://www.aka.fi/fi/tietysti/blogit/muinaiskalututkinnon-alkeita/uhrilampaista-paperiin/ (accessed 5 January 2018).

[18] See e.g. Peter Tångeberg, *Mittelalterliche Holzkulpturen und Altarschreine in Schweden. Studien zu Form, Material und Technik*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien: Stockholm 1986, 57.

The dull yellow tone gave clear indication of ochre.[19] All these pigments were commonly used throughout the medieval period, as well as in the following centuries.[20] Thus, the analyses do not reveal whether the paint fragments are primary or secondary.

The sculpture has been conserved in 1946,[21] 1968[22] and 1998–2000.[23] As it is often the case with medieval objects, the documented measures of conservation of the *Unknown Saint* cover only a very short and late period of the history of the sculpture. However, even these twentieth-century treatments illustrate conservation cycle – how objects have undergone repairs and/or their appearance was felt to be aesthetically inadequate at regular intervals.[24] Even before the sculpture came into the museum (1881), the motives for restoration had been approximately the same – keep the construction stable and the appearance attractive enough to be seen – even if the implementation and the underlying values may have varied. In the context of the last major conservation during 1998–2000, the sculpture was X-rayed during the conservation and the metal 'bulb' inside the head was first revealed.[25] The sculpture was X-rayed again in 2016, using digital radiography.[26] Different source-detector angles and exposure parameters were used to detect the content of the cavity. The area of the bulb absorbed radiation very intensively, giving a non-transparent shadow to the radio-

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[19] X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis (*Oxford X-MET 7500*) conducted by Henni Reijonen and Jukkapekka Etäsalo. Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi, 5 June 2017. The pXRF measurement points were: beside the left eye (flesh tone), the lips and the second lowest drapery on the right side of the frontal part (red), and the lower part of the gown (yellow).

[20] Like other earth color pigments (made using synthetic iron oxide), yellow ochre is still commonly used. Toxicity along with replacements (especially titanium white and cadmium red) gradually decreased the use of white lead and vermilion by the 20th century. See e.g Kate Helwig, 'Iron Oxide Pigments: Natural and Synthetic', in Barbara H. Berrie ed., Artists' Pigments: *A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, vol 4, Archetype: London 2007, 39–109; Herman Kühn, 'Lead White'; Rutherford J. Gettens, Robert L Feller & W. T. Chase: 'Vermilion and Cinnabar', both in Ashok Roy ed., *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, vol 2, National Gallery of Art: Washington 1993, 67–81 and 159–82.

[21] The condition of the sculpture was surveyed and some minor conservation treatments carried out by artist-restorer Oskari Niemi. He considered the paper layer secondary, and the colour fragments to be oil paint. Niemi consolidated the detached parts of paper and restored 'white spots' of visible ground. He also mentioned that the separate wooden parts were almost loose. Notebook by Oskari Niemi [1945–1951], 25 May 1946.

[22] The backboard and the drapery part were glued in 1969, when the sculpture was conserved for the exhibition in Paris. Conservation report by Veikko Kiljunen, Mirja-Liisa Waismaa & Reijo Kautto, February 1968 (object H2073:3) Taidekonservoinnin arkisto, Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi.

[23] Conservation report by Sari Lintula, April 2000 (object H2073:3). Taidekonservoinnin arkisto, Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi. During this conservation the detached ground and pigments layers were also consolidated, the surface cleaned (except the paper), and the white ground areas were again restored.

[24] About the conservation cycle, see Henni Reijonen, 'Suomalaisten museokokoelmien konservoinnin historiaa', in Susanna Pettersson & Pauliina Kinanen eds., *Suomen museohistoria*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2010, 288–311, at 291.

[25] Conservation report by Sari Lintula, April 2000 (object H2073:3). Taidekonservoinnin arkisto, Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi .

[26] Computed radiography (CR) examination (*GE Eresco 42 MF4* X-ray unit combined with CRxVision scanner and *Rhythm RT software*) conducted by Pia Klaavu and Henni Reijonen. Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi, 1–5 February 2016.

Figure 5. CT localizer images in the sagital (left) and coronal (right) planes show the drilling hole and its contents within the sculpture's head and also some metal nails elsewhere in the sculpture.

graphic image. On this basis, the metal piece seemed to be solid. X-ray fluorescence analysis of the bulb through the back board gave a weak, but obvious, reference to lead.[27]

All in all, the materials and techniques used in the *Unknown Saint* follow the main 'trends' in manufacturing wooden sculptures during the latter half of the 13th century. In Finland as well as in Sweden oak was commonly used in sculptures from the second quarter of the 13th century to the end of the 14th century.[28] Oak was hard and durable and its size enabled the manufacture of larger sculptures. Even if the sculptors favoured making the sculpture from one piece of wood it was still not unusual to 'construct' the sculpture of several pieces of wood which would then be attached to

[27] X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis (*Oxford X-MET 7500*) conducted by Henni Reijonen and Jukkapekka Etäsalo. Suomen Kansallismuseo, Konservointi, 5 June 2017. The result is attenuated by the wooden back board.

[28] Katri Vuola, 'Puusta vuollut, värillä elävöitetyt', in Sanna Teittinen ed., *Pyhät ja pakanat. Ihmisyyden kuvia*. (Kansallismuseon julkaisuja, 12), Museovirasto: Helsinki 2017, 31–41, at 36; Tångeberg 1986, 19.

each other with wooden plugs or iron nails, both applied in the Nousiainen sculpture. Therefore, it is plausible that the pieces of wood forming the folds on the right side and in the front, below the left arm, are original, not 'repairs of birch wood' as interpreted earlier.[29] They could as well be of lime or alder, the latter commonly used in Finland to make sculptures or parts of sculptures.[30] Neither can the technical realization of the carved form be defined as 'provincial' or of a lesser quality, as claimed by Nordman – on the contrary, the sculptor has achieved an illusion of three-dimensionality and volume using only a very flat core that is joined together by two logs of oak and added to with smaller pieces of other wood species.

Dual-Energy Computed Tomography Imaging of the *Unknown Saint*

A Dual-Energy Computed Tomography scan was performed to obtain 3D information about the sculpture. Special interest was paid to the sculpture's head to gather more information from the hidden metal object as well as from the softer materials inside the drilling hole shown on the earlier radiographs – their size, distance from sculpture's surface, and CT-characteristics with the aim of possibly identifying some of the included objects or materials. According to one hypothesis, the

	DECT	**UHR CT**
Scanning region	Whole sculpture	Head of the sculpture
Tube voltage (kVp)	80 / Sn 140	120
Quality reference mAs	650	380
Detector configuration (mm)	32 x 0.6	16 x 0.6
Pitch	0.5	0.85
Rotation time (s)	0.5	1.0
$CTDI_{vol}$ (mGy)	14.20	83.03
DLP (mGy·cm)	2037	1691
Reconstructed section thickness (mm)	0.5	0.4
Pixels	512 x 512	1024 x 1024
Reconstruction algorithm	Safire, level 2	Safire, level 5
Reconstruction kernel	i30f	v80u
Display field of view (cm)	35.8	20.1
Pixel size in x- and y-direction (mm)	0.70	0.39

Table 1. Details of the used scanning protocols and image reconstruction parameters.

[29] Conservator Oskari Niemi's notes, see 'Lappuluettelo', Kokoelma-arkisto (Archive of the Collections), Suomen Kansallismuseo; Nordman 1965, 89, nr. 1.

[30] See Vuola 2017, 36.

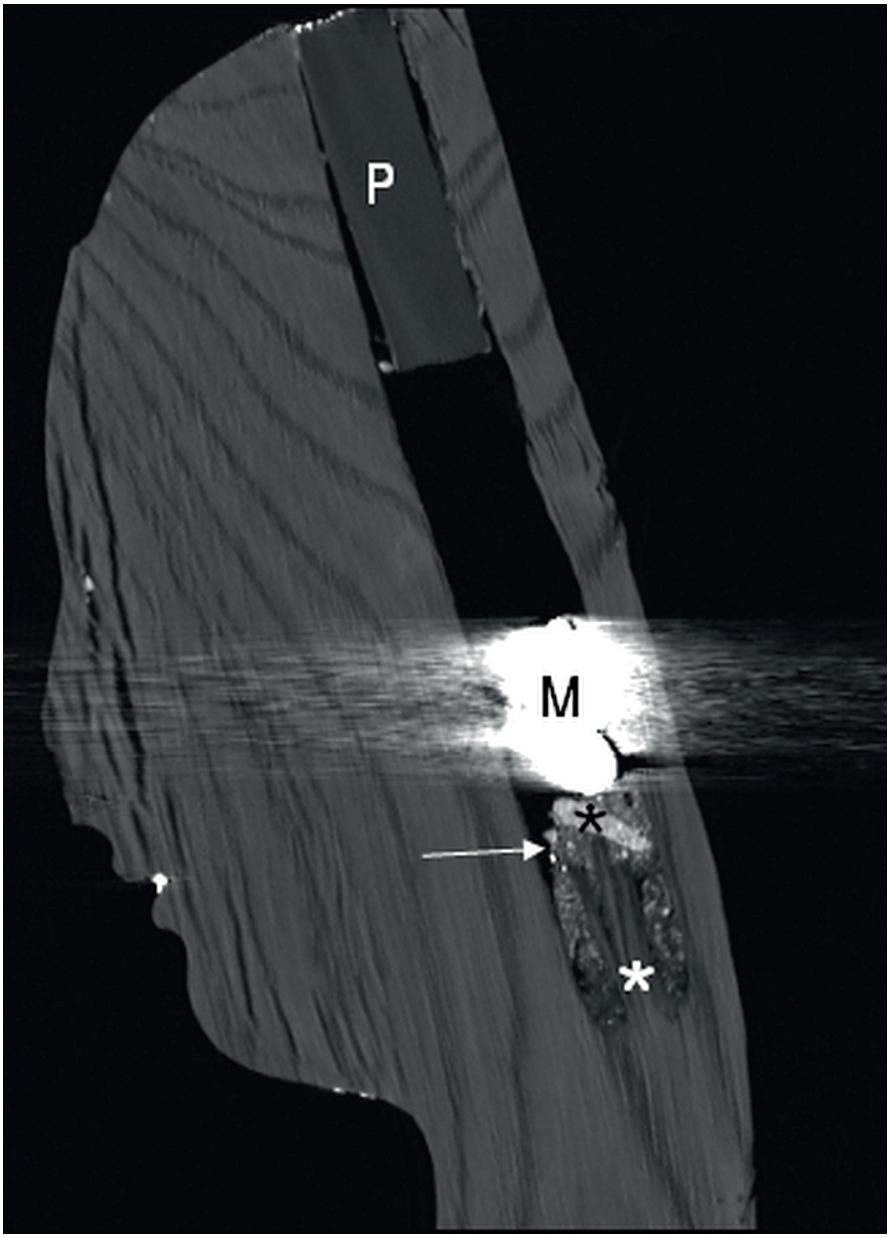

Figure 6. A mid-sagittal ultrahigh-resolution CT image of the sculpture's head shows a two-cm-wide drilling hole containing a wooden peg (P) and a metal object (M). Under the metal object the drilling hole contains a gritty substance with a flat surface (arrow) that surrounds the bottom of the wooden core (white asterisk). The substance has a heterogeneous structure and contains a couple of bigger objects, the largest of which is shown on the image (black asterisk). The metal object caused remarkable image distortions (particularly white and black streaks) around the metal object due to high x-ray attenuation.

hole on the head could have functioned as a receptacle for relics, and this would explain why small samples of bone tissue or soft tissue were found inside the head.

The sculpture was scanned in a supine position on a Siemens SOMATOM Definition Flash CT scanner (Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany). After localizer imaging was performed both in the postero-anterior and lateral directions (Fig. 5), the whole sculpture was scanned with a helical DECT protocol, and the head of the sculpture also with an ultrahigh-resolution CT protocol (details of the scanning protocols and image reconstruction techniques are given in Table 1). The images were reconstructed with an iterative reconstruction technique that aimed, among other things, to reduce metal artifacts (i.e. image distortions) seen in the images. Electron density images, effective Z images, and monoenergetic images (40 keV to 170 keV) were calculated from the DECT data using a Syngovia workstation (Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany). Altogether 31 regions-of-interest were drawn in seven axial planes of the sculpture's head to analyse the seen targets. The region-of-interest analysis produced effective atomic numbers and electron densities of different

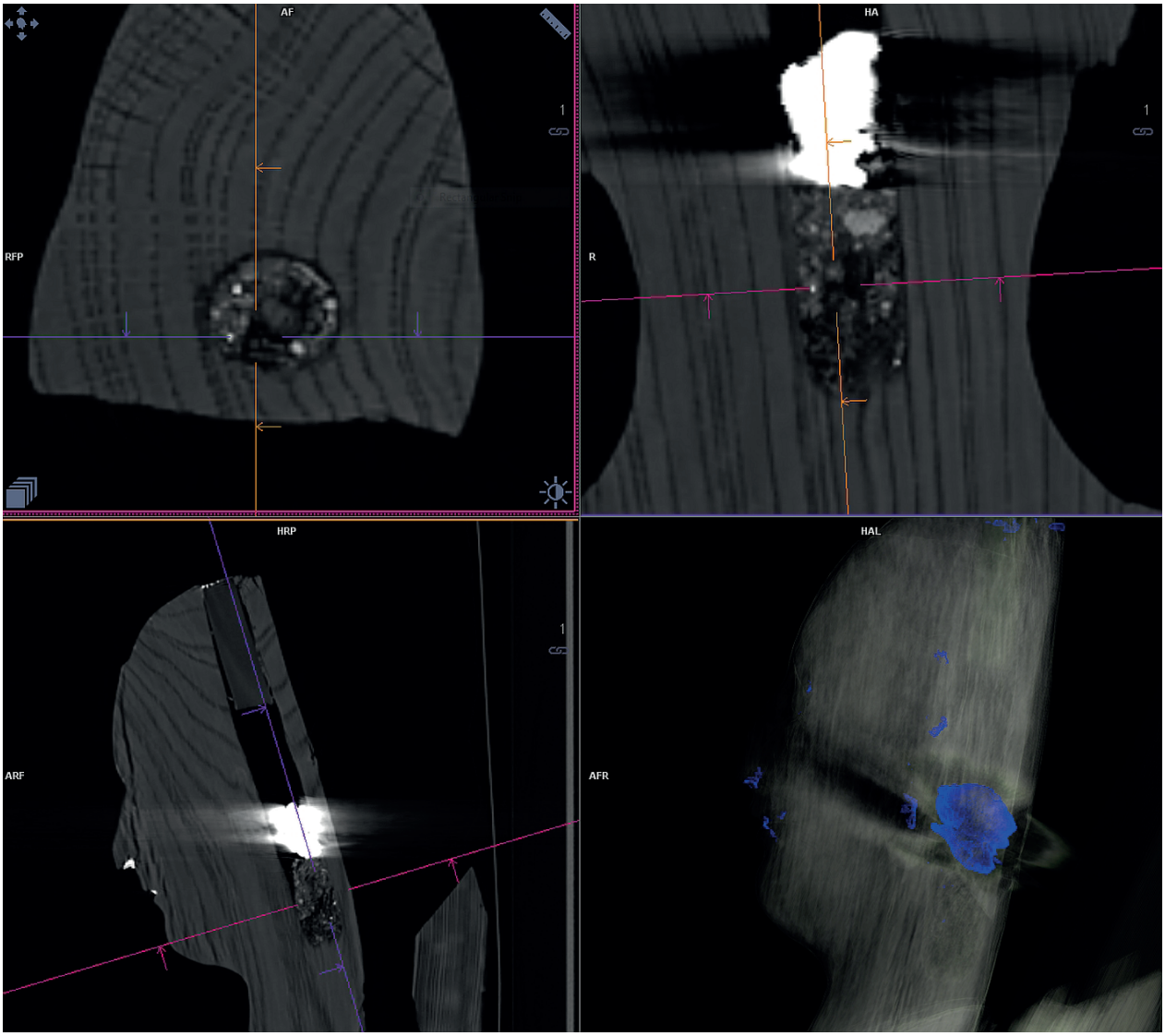

Figure 7 a-d. The CT images of the sculpture's head (upper-left (axial), upper-right (coronal), and lower-left (sagittal) images) show the drilling hole and its contents. The lower-right image shows the metal object in a 3D volume-rendered image. The metal object caused remarkable image artifacts (image distortions) around the object due to high x-ray attenuation. The beam hardening and streak artifacts were seen as signal void areas, and as white and black streaks in the images.

materials, dual-energy indices (DEI), and CT numbers in Hounsfield units (HU) for the 80 and 140 kVp tube voltage images to define x-ray attenuation characteristics. The CT numbers from the same regions-of-interest were also measured from the 120 kVp ultrahigh-resolution images.

As a result of the CT scanning, the structure and exact size of the drilled hole inside the sculpture's head was determined: the hole is 17 cm long and 2 cm wide and it is closed by a 6 cm-long wooden peg made of a different wood than the sculpture itself (Fig. 6). At the bottom of the drill hole, there is a heterogeneous substance 4 cm in height, placed under a dense metal object of 2.5 cm in height and 2 cm in width. The substance on the bottom has a grit-like structure consisting of different materials and it surrounds a wooden core at the bottom of the drill hole – a drilling remnant. On the sagittal view, a flattened upper surface of this substance can be seen (Fig. 6). This

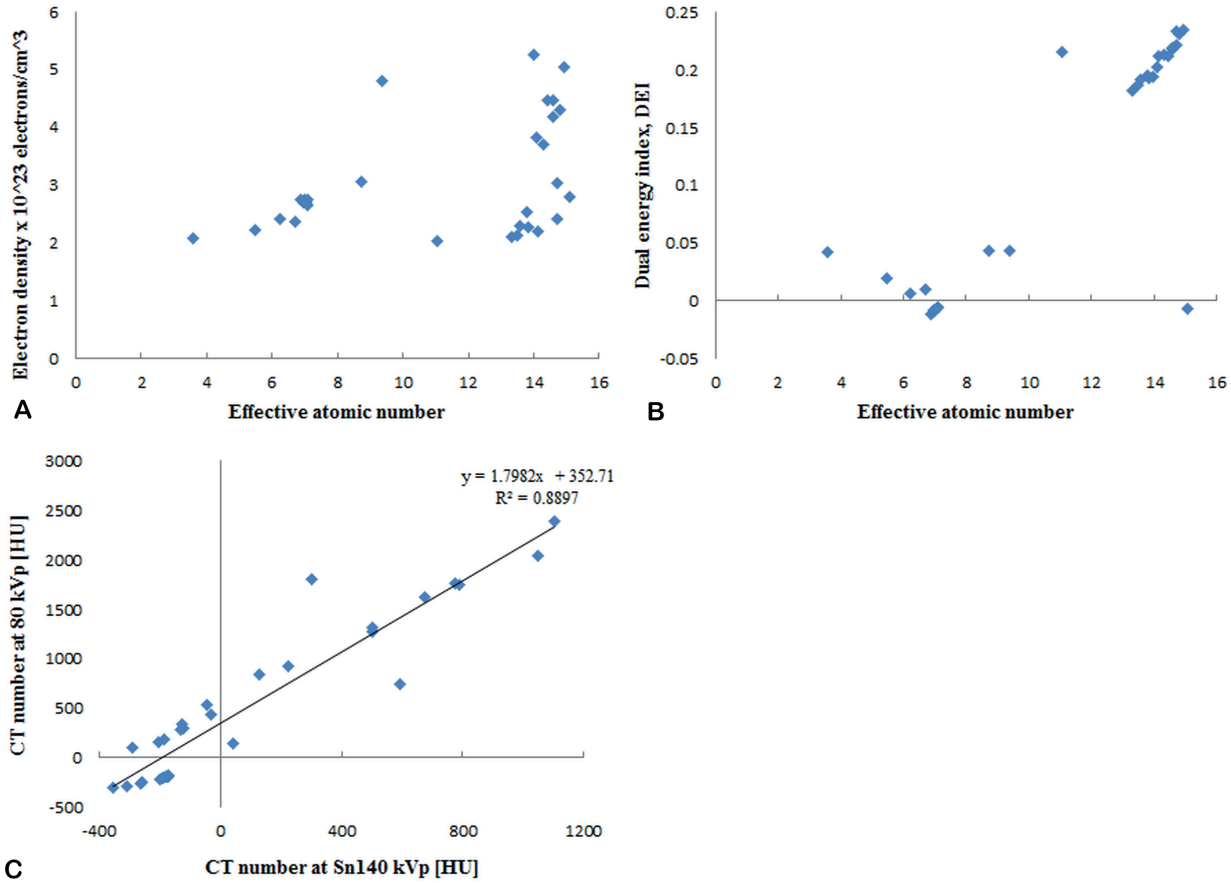

Figure 8. DECT imaging performed on the target object seen below the metal object delineated a few groups of different materials. A) the electron densities as a function of effective atomic numbers, B) dual-energy indices as a function of effective atomic numbers, and C) CT numbers in the low kVp images as a function of CT numbers in the high kVp images.

suggests that the substance on the bottom is not solid, but rather has a powdery consistency. Within this substance there are numerous tiny objects of different size, shape, and attenuation characteristics. There are small pebbles of different density, at least one flat sheath-like object of a similar density as wood, and few larger and denser, but still heterogeneous objects with a density similar to bone. The largest of these objects is 1.3 cm long. However, none of these objects could definitely be identified by their shape.

On the basis of measuring electron densities inside the head, a few separate groups, and thus different materials, were observed inside the sculpture's head. The electron densities varied between 2.03 and 5.25 x 10^{23} electrons/cm^3, the effective atomic numbers between 3.58 and 15.08, and DEIs between -0.011 and 0.235 in different materials. The CT number comparison between the low and high tube voltage images proved a linear x-ray attenuation. The electron densities as a function of effective atomic numbers, the DEIs as a function of effective atomic numbers, and the CT numbers in the 80 kVp images as a function of CT numbers in Sn140 kVp images are presented in Figure 8.

The woody body and head of the sculpture had a mean effective atomic number of 7.01, electron density of 2.72 x 10^{23} electrons/cm^3, and DEI of -0.008. Otherwise, the target object placed

under the metal contained e.g. materials that had electron densities and effective atomic numbers similar to solid dense bone (electron densities 4-6 x 10^{23} electrons/cm^3 and effective atomic numbers ~13-15). However, and as mentioned previously, the shapes of the detected objects were not clearly bone-like, although very small fragments of bone cannot be ruled out either. Moreover, it is difficult to name certain materials inside the drilling hole based on the DECT analysis results due to the complex nature of different mixtures.[31] Should the findings described here, namely the bone- and wood-like objects together with the powdery substance at the bottom of the hole and the metal object now located on a wooden core, be interpreted as relics? This will be discussed in the following section.

Relics, Sculptures, and Sculptures as Reliquaries

As mentioned in the introduction, the depositing of relics inside wooden, polychrome sculptures or attached to their surfaces, has been a little-discussed and little-researched phenomenon in Finland.[32] Relics could be attached to the sculptures in several ways: under the wooden plug on the head, hung on the surface, placed within a receptacle inside the front of the sculpture or attached to the cavity carved on the back of the sculpture, for example. Sculptures with relics are also known to have had special cultic value and they have even been considered to be able to make miracles. In the Scandinavian context – thus leaving the material in Finland out – the Swedish art historian Lena Liepe has counted some twenty cases of relic finds or cavities and containers for relics and consecrated hosts incorporated into sculptures.[33] In Estonia, Krista Andreson has recently discussed the presence of relics in crucifixes.[34] Nevertheless, holes, cavities, and extraordinary structures in some of the free-standing sculptures indicate that this practice has been well known in Finland as well.[35]

In scholarly discussion, relics are usually understood as the remains of deceased, holy people. They consist of a corpse or pieces of the corpse, including bones and soft tissue, such as organs or

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[31] According to the physical and chemical backgrounds, effective atomic numbers and electron densities overlap between mixtures. For example, a mud or clay containing aluminium oxide (Al^2O^3) has theoretically an effective atomic number of approximately 11.1. Furthermore, the single elements typically seen in different minerals have the following effective numbers: Si (14), O (8), Al (13), Fe (26), Ca (20), Na (11), K (19), and Mg (12).

[32] From a broader perspective, hand reliquaries and reliquary busts can be discussed under the category of sculpture. On these objects, see some of the art historian Sofia Lahti's recent publications listed in n. 9.

[33] See Lena Liepe's review on Scandinavian sculptures with relic deposits and on the ontology of the relic statues, 'The Presence of the Sacred: Relics in Medieval Wooden Statues in Scandinavia', in Noëlle L.W. Streeton & Kaja Kollaandsrud eds., *Paint and Piety: Collected Essays on Medieval Painting and Polychrome Sculpture*, Archetype Publications: London 2014, 39–50, at 39 and 47.

[34] Krista Andreson, 'The Presence of the Sacred: A 13th-century Cult Image from Saaremaa (Estonia)', *Baltic Journal of Art History* 8 (2014), 7–43.

[35] Examples of sculptures suggested as having had relics deposited within them are: St. Olav in St. Gustavs, SW Finland (Nordman 1965, 120, 139); St. Olav, Uusikirkko (Kalanti), SW Finland, National Museum of Finland, ID H4971 (Karl Konrad Meinander, *Medeltida altarskåp och träsniderier i Finlands kyrkor* (Finska Fornminnesföreningens tidskrift 24) 1908, 68; Nordman 1965, 135, fig. 114; *Finna.fi* web service, https://www.finna.fi/Record/musketti.M012:H4971: (accessed 26 January 2018)); St. Catherine, Turku Cathedral, SW Finland (Nordman 1965, 205–6, fig. 192 b.); Job, Karjalohja, Newland, National Museum of Finland, ID H1142:2 (Nordman 1965, 583; *Finna.fi* web service, https://www.finna.fi/Record/musketti.M012:H1142:2 (accessed 26 January 2018)). Additionally, the hollowed head of the fragmented sculpture of St. Olav in Kalvola, Tavastia Proper, may have functioned as a container for relics (Nordman 1965, 131–32).

skin. From the theological point of view, from the moment of death, a saint continued to live both in heaven and on earth in his or her corpse and within every piece of the saint's body – the saint was present in his remains just as Christ was present in the host at the moment of communion.[36] In addition to the bodily remains of saints (primary relics), objects and materials that had been in contact with holy people could also be venerated as holy, and these are called secondary relics or touch relics (*brandea*). They could consist of sand, wood or pebbles collected from places where biblical narratives took place.[37] 'Stones of Gethsemane' belong, for example, in the collection of relics in Turku Cathedral.[38] According to Catholic incarnation theology, the host was the flesh of Christ and was therefore used as a relic. Relics associated with Christ could also consist, for example, pieces of the True Cross or tools of his torment.[39] Until the end of the Middle Ages, relics were not supposed to be seen or touched directly, so they were covered and hidden in often sumptuous caskets, shrines and statues. Relics 'radiated their holiness' even to their wrappings and the reliquary caskets they were kept in, which thus became objects of veneration themselves.[40]

Against the background briefly described here, the results, albeit provisory, of the analyses of the materials of the particles enclosed inside the head of the *Unknown Saint*, may indicate relics being placed there: small particles of bone and wood, and possibly sand. Although some of the small particles are of bone, they are not necessarily of human origin. Secondly, in many occasions the age of the bones or their fragments venerated as remains of a saint are dated, for example, by radiocarbon analyses to a different area than the saint's supposed lifespan.[41] However, they may still have been considered as 'genuine' during the Middle Ages. In theory, an *authentica* or *cedula* – a name label made of parchment or paper often attached to the relics to identify them as belonging

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[36] Räsänen 2017, 10; Annika Elisabeth Fisher, 'Cross Altar and Crucifix in Ottonian Cologne. Past Narrative, Present Ritual, Future Resurrection', in Søren Kaspersen & Erik Thunø eds., *Decorating the Lord's table. On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, Museum Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen 2006, 43–62, at 49–50.

[37] Martina Bagnoli, 'Dressing the Relics: Some thoughts on the Custom of Relic Wrapping in Medieval Christianity', in James Robinson, Lloyd de Beer & Anna Harnden eds., *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period* (Research Publication 195), The British Museum: London 2014, 100–9, at 107; Julia M. H. Smith, 'Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (ca. 700–1200)' in Ron Johnston ed., 2010-2011 *Lectures* (Proceedings of the British Academy, 181), The British Academy: Oxford 2012, 143–167, at 146.

[38] Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen & Markus Hiekkanen, 'Pyhän Gertrudin pyhäinjäännös Turun tuomiokirkossa. Jyrsijännahka pyhänä esineenä', in Aila Nieminen, Pia Olsson, Helena Ruotsala & Katriina Siivonen eds., *Aineen taikaa. Näkyvän ja näkymättömän kulttuurin jäljillä* (Ethnos-toimite 15), Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2011, 124–136, at 125.

[39] Fisher 2006, 43–62, at 49; Smith 2012, 148; for Scandinavian and Estonian examples of crucifixes with receptacles or cavities for relics or the host, see Liepe 2014, 42–43; Ehasalu, Andreson & Vahur 2012; Andreson 2014.

[40] Bagnoli 2014, 102–3.

[41] The recent radiocarbon dating of a piece of bone found in the head of the so-called *Madonna of Viklau* (end of the 12th century) from Gotland (The Swedish History Museum, Stockholm) revealed that the bone was 3500 years old. Katarina Hedström, 'Hör om Viklau-madonnans tusenåriga hemlighet', *Sveriges Radio* P4 Gotland, 1 October 2017, http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=94&artikel=6788695. (accessed 31 January 2018). Peter Tångeberg's earlier description of the small textile bundle enclosing the relics impeded beside the plug on the head, see Tångeberg 1986, 16. See also on the datings of the relics (small pieces of bone) related to St. Gertrude in Turku Cathedral in Jukkapekka Taavitsainen & Markus Hiekkanen 2011, 132.

to a certain saint – might be found among the small particles. Unfortunately, the precise form and texture of the surface of the small metal object, most probably of lead, could not be affirmed during the investigation. Therefore no further hints were gained concerning its origin and function. In the context of the veneration of saints, lead (or pewter, a mixture of tin and lead) was used, for example, for ampullas containing holy water for oils or pilgrimage patches collected by travellers at the holy sites.[42] The small size of the objects, smaller than many of the known leaden pilgrimage patches, could as well be a part of a larger entity. It is impossible to say whether the object has gained its form 'naturally' in a melting process, for example, or whether the shape is intentional. And lastly, the interpretation of the powdery, sand-like material around the wooden core of the hole must remain open, even though it would be tempting to suggest it might be a handful of some kind of holy soil or small stones from the Tomb of Christ.[43] To sum up, the radiographs made by CT-scanning showed different kind of particles that could be interpreted as a collection of relic-kind materials and items placed in the hole in the head of the *Unknown Saint*.

Relics found in the drilled holes on the heads of wooden sculptures are often interpreted as secondary placements, because the primary function of the hole is presumed to be technical. The plug in the hole is actually a remnant of the handle used to ease the finishing of the surface (grounding, painting, gilding).[44] The removal of the plug would probably have caused damage to the sculpture because the plugs usually fit very tightly.[45] Nevertheless, and as Lena Liepe has addressed, through the relic – both visibly or invisibly – the ontological status of the image changed: the holy person depicted in the image became present in a real sense.[46] Liepe suggests that the sculpture was thus transformed into a reliquary. The bodily remains of the saint (or other holy substances) sacralised the image and the image confirmed the authenticity of the relic.[47]

As is well-known, Hans Belting has argued that already during the Ottonian period (10th century) there was an analogy between a reliquary and a sculpture: both objects were considered to be physical evidence of the presence of the saint and they also were reminders of each other in their

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[42] Examples of medieval pilgrimage patches and ampullas in the Nordic countries, see e.g. object numbers 306–29 in Helena Edgren & Poul Grinder-Hansen eds., *Margareeta. Pohjolan Rouva ja Valtias. Kalmarin unioni 600 vuotta*, Nordisk Ministerråd, Danmarks Nationalmuseum: Copenhagen 1997, 401–8; A pilgrimage patch depicting St. Brigitte and some medieval coins were found in 1887 inside the altarpiece at Akaa, South-Western Finland. See e.g. Markus Hiekkanen, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot* (Kirjokansi 87), Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2014, 281.

[43] The materials and objects deposited in the head of a sculpture of the Virgin Mary and child (ID 8323) in Berliner Skulpturensammlung are interesting in this context; there was two pieces of leather and one of parchment with texts (*authenticae*) as well as fibres (flax), seeds (grape, German millet) and some dust (earth) in and around a small bag of silk (the sculpture has been mentioned earlier in n. 5). The findings were interpreted as relics from the Tomb of Christ. *Bildwerke Nördlich der Alpen 1050 bis 1380. Kritischer Bestandskatalog* 2014, 273.

[44] Tångeberg 1986, 16.

[45] There are some traces on the rim of the hole that might indicate an earlier attempt to remove the plug (Fig. 2 a).

[46] Liepe 2014, 47; Anton Legner, *Kölner Heilige und Heiligtümer. Ein Jahrtausend europäischer Reliquienkultur*, Greven Verlag: Köln 2003, 51.

[47] Liepe 2014, 47. On the use of the concept of 'reliquary' in connection with wooden sculptures, see e.g. Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture: Meaning, Form, Conservation*. Ed. with a new introduction by Michele D. Marincola. Getty Conservation Institute: Los Angeles 2015, 27–29. Recently, Krista Andreson has referred to sculptures enclosing relics as reliquaries, see Andreson 2014, 19.

appearance. In practice, relics justified the veneration of three-dimensional images, for there was always the danger of being accused of idolatry, that is the worshipping of false gods. But as Belting points out, images gradually took the place of relics during the late Middle Ages.[48]

Despite the close alliance of relics and sculptures, in practice, relics did not necessarily have any connection to the holy person depicted in the image. On the whole, the altar, the image, the reliquary (and the relics) and the sculpture formed a complex entity in which their meanings and forms intertwined.[49] Therefore, as in the case of the *Unknown Saint* originating from Nousiainen, very little is preserved of this entity, and interpretation of the function of the fragmented sculpture for devotional and liturgical purposes is challenging.

The *Unknown Saint* in the Context of Thirteenth-century Sculpture in Scandinavia and Finland

The scholarly discussion in the 1940s and 1960s focused on the question of the identity and, in some measure, the origin of the *Unknown Saint*. The research carried out was based on comparative style analyses and iconographical analyses. In this final section the results of these analyses will be reassessed and supplemented by some new observations and interpretations.

Art historian C.A. Nordman was the first to point out the sculpture's dependency on the visual language of the monumental sculpture of cathedrals. He also saw resemblance to the monumental sculpture of St. Erik (later identified as St. Olav) in the church of Roslagsbro (Uppland, Sweden), a stated wooden copy of the portal sculpture once decorating the trumeau pillar of the Western portal of Uppsala Cathedral.[50] The well preserved sculpture is dated to the 1290s. The Nousiainen sculpture's 'French style' could, according to Nordman, be explained by the location of the workshop that produced it – the workshop would have been working closely with Uppsala Cathedral during the early phase of its construction, in the 1270s, when the first French sculptors taking part to the decoration of the church would have arrived to Uppsala.[51] Despite the similarity in form and style in these sculptures, Nordman, consequently, dated the Nousiainen sculpture to some decades earlier than the sculpture of St. Erik. He interpreted the facial features of the *Unknown Saint* as 'tender' and more feminine. The narrow projection on the upper end of the backboard attached to the sculpted front side he interpreted as a leftover of a pigtail. He also noted that there was a place for a crown on the head. Additionally, he suggested that the dress 'was not the kind that a king would wear'.[52] These observations, supported by his comparative analyses of the sculpture with some examples

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[48] Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, C.H. Beck: München 1990, 342–344; Legner 2003, 67.

[49] Legner 2003, 67.

[50] Nordman 1965, 89–93. On the attribution history of the Roslagsbro sculpture, see Carina Jacobsson, *Beställare och finansiärer: träskulptur från 1300-talet i gamla ärkestiftet*. Ödin: Visby 2002, 292–94.

[51] Nordman 1965, 93.

[52] Nordman 1965, 90.

Fig. 9. The fragment of the strap of the cloak that is carved in low relief is visible below the right shoulder of the saint. Photo: Katri Vuola.

of monumental sculptures in France, led him to the conclusion that the sculpture would depict the Virgin Mary or a female saint.[53]

The idea of depicting a pigtail (or two) on the back of the head is odd – from the beginning of the thirteenth century, holy virgins were usually depicted with a veil covering most of their hair, whether it was plaited or not. Then again, art historian Olga Alice Nygren overlooked the question of the headwear entirely thus missing an important symbol for understanding the iconography of the sculpture, namely the crown. Crowns were reserved only for royalty either in the profane or the celestial realms, and they were never used for apostles. She described the hair of the saint as short and suggested that the youthful, androgynous face belonged to St. John the Evangelist. The proportionally large and clearly visible ears of the saint she interpreted as masculine features.[54]

Naturally, the analyses of art historians have been directed towards the better-preserved parts of the sculpture, the face and the clothing, whereas the now missing parts – the hands and their gestures and the attributes they were holding – have had less attention paid to them. Nordman or Nygren did not speculate why the back of the head was missing. A larger piece of wood that has formed the back of the slightly forward bent head possibly encircled by a *nimbus* (halo), seem clearly to have been sawn off from the upper end of the backboard (Fig. 2 a). The exact form of the hair cannot be judged, but it has been drawn behind the ears and was probably, as Nygren has suggested, short.

An important detail of the garments on the *Unknown Saint* that has been overlooked by earlier researchers is the strap of the mantle crossing the chest. The strap is carved in low relief and, having lost its initial colour, is difficult to detect (Fig. 9). The form of the stump of the right arm, the low cavity on the right side of the chest and an area with seemingly unfinished narrow pleats above the belt on the right side could imply that the right arm was lifted up across the chest. If so, the saint

[53] The comparative material Nordman used in the connection of the *Unknown Saint* comprises a wooden sculpture of a king (?) in Louvre (inv. R.F. 1190, see fig. 181 in Jacobsson 2002, at 295) and stone sculptures of St. Genova (Louvre Museum), St. Modestia (Chartres Cathedral), and St. Ulpha (Amiens Cathedral), see Nordman 1965, 92–93.

[54] Nygren 1945, 55.

Fig. 10. St Olav from Sälltorp (Halland), Sweden. Oak, ca 1250-1275. Photo: Lennart Karlsson.

may have been holding the mantle strap.[55] This gesture, performed with either the left or the right arm, was commonly used when depicting aristocracy, rulers or saintly and biblical kings – as is the case with the façade sculptures of Chartres Cathedral or the commemorative tomb sculptures of the French and English kings from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example. The gesture had its origins in the courtly culture of the European continent and was especially popular during the thirteenth century.[56] In the context of Nordic figurative art during the first part of the thirteenth century, the gesture seems to be combined with a mantle leaving the right shoulder and arm free – later the gesture was combined with a mantle covering both shoulders, as many examples of the wooden sculptures of the enthroned St. Olav from Norway and Sweden demonstrate (Fig. 10).[57] So the dress of the *Unknown Saint* was, indeed, suitable for a king.[58] The manner of holding the stripe of the mantle was, however, not reserved only for men of the highest rank, but for women as well. In addition to noble birth and high status, it expressed well-being, joy, loftiness and blissfulness, the latter emotional states especially when combined with a

[55] It seems that the now lost upper, separately attached arm was supported from below by a wooden nail – a technical solution, which could support the idea of a raised hand.

[56] See e.g. Herman Bengtsson, 'Gesternas roll i det medeltida bildberättandet', in Helena Edgren & Marianne Roos eds., *Bild och berättelse. Föredrag framlagda vid det 17:e nordiska symposiet för ikonografisk forskning, Kaksklerta, Finland 19–24 september 2000* (Picta 4), Åbo Akademi: Åbo 2003, 9–20, at 9–10.

[57] See e.g. St. Peter painted on the tabernacle door at Fåberg, Oppland (ca. 1250), a sculpture of a male saint from Horg, South Trondelag (1240–55) and sculptures of the enthroned Virgin Mary from Hospitalskirken, South Trondelag (1230–50) and Hedalen, Oppland (1230–40). All wear a similar kind of mantle and dress. According to Blindheim, all these sculptures were influenced by English or Anglo-Norwegian Early Gothic style. Martin Blindheim, *Gothic Painted Wooden Sculpture in Norway 1220–1350*, Messel Forlag: Oslo 2004: 86–87, 96–97, 110–11, 114–15. In Sweden, St. Olav from Hannäs and Ukna (Småland). See Carina Jacobsson, *Höggotisk träskulptur i gamla Linköpings stift*, Ödins förlag: Visby 1995, 130–31.

[58] Interesting in this context is also a standing Female Saint from Torekov (Scania) dated around 1250. The stripe of her mantle is clearly visible but the right hand has been holding a attribute. See Lena Liepe, *Den medeltida träskulpturen i Skåne. Produktion och förvärv* (Skånsk senmedeltid och renässans. Skriftserie utgiven av Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund 14–15), Lund University Press: Lund 1995, 98, catalogue nr. 235; Hampus Cinthio, *Äldre kyrklig konst på historiska museet i Lund. En katalog*. Lunds universitets historiska museum: Eslöv 2013, 44–45.

Fig. 11. "The Stone of Mechtild" in the Cloister Church of Varnhem (Västergötland), Sweden. Photo: Henrik Hultén, Swedish National Heritage Board.

smile.[59] As to the red colour of the mantle – whether red was the original colour or not could not be confirmed during the examination – this colour is commonly used for martyr's clothing, whereas the Virgin Mary, for example, usually wears blue or gilded clothes.[60] In preserved Finnish sculpture, there seem to be no cases of the gesture described here, nor of the mantle leaving the other arm free, except, as suggested here, in the case of the *Unknown Saint*.

It is difficult to find any close parallel for the form or style of the *Unknown Saint* among Nordic wooden sculpture, even though many large size sculptures of saints in standing position from Southern Sweden around and after 1250, for example, are similarly echoing the form and style of the French and even English cathedrals – they may even have been imported to Sweden.[61] However, the tomb slab of Birger Jarl, his wife Mechtild and son Erik in the former cloister church in Varnhem (Västergötland, Sweden) is worth mentioning in this context.[62] The reliefs on the slab, which has been dated to the years after Erik's death dead in 1275, belong to the few surviving sculptured 'portraits' in Scandinavia from the thirteenth century (Fig. 11).[63] These kinds of funerary monuments functioned as places for commemorating the dead and for holding masses for their souls to

[59] Bengtsson 2003, 10–11.

[60] Small fragments of a red pigment with a more purple tone than on the now investigated large painted areas were discovered e.g. under the stump of the right arm.

[61] One of the most discussed of these sculptures is the Apostle from Norra Vånga (Västergötland), ca. 1250–75. See Aaron Andersson, *English Influence in Norwegian and Swedish Figuresculpture in Wood 1220–1270* (Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie-, och antikvitetsakademiens arkeologiska monografier 35), KVHAA: Stockholm 1949, 247–56.

[62] The deceased depicted on the slab are assumed to be Birger of Sweden (Birger Jarl, ca. 1200–66), his second wife, Queen Mechtild (Matilda) of Denmark (1225–88) and Birger's son and Duke of Småland, Erik Birgersson of Sweden (b. 1251). The slab has covered three graves and was discovered in the early 1920s inside the church. On the research history of the graves, see Jan Svanberg, *Furstebilder från Folkungatid, Skarabergs länsmuseum*: Skara 1987, 75–79.

[63] Svanberg 1987, 71, 82.

shorten the time they would spent in Purgatory.[64] The deceased are depicted erect and living, their eyes wide open waiting for Doomsday. The material used for this monument, the style of the workshop and the function of the reliefs on the Varnhem slab differ from those of the *Unknown Saint*, but the dresses, faces and gestures seem to reflect the same courtly culture and the ideal of youthful beauty of the time: all the figures hold the strap of the mantle with their fingers while the other hand collects the folds of the mantle at the waist. The gender of the depicted persons is expressed mainly through the hair and headwear – the youthful, beardless men have similarly accentuated ears in the shape of the letter C as the *Unknown Saint*, whereas Mechtild's ears are covered with the hair.

As Jan Svanberg has pointed out in his analyses of the reliefs in Varnhem, the funerary art of the thirteenth century was influenced by the decorations of the portals and façades of the great cathedrals on the European continent and in the Britain. Ecclesiastical art, whether it was devotional or commemorative, was commissioned mostly by the upper classes – by aristocracy and upper clergy. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that they used their professional and family networks to acquire sculptures from the areas they had visited or were in other ways familiar with.[65] On the basis of iconographical or stylistic analyses only, it is difficult to deduce, where exactly a sculpture was produced. The historical context of the Nousiainen sculpture cannot be dealt with within the frames of this article, but when considering that the church of Nousiainen was the memorial church of the patron saint of Finland, St. Henrik, and a former bishop's church (until 1229), the interest in furnishing it may have concerned especially the ecclesiastical and political elite of the bishopric.[66] It is worth mentioning that the son of Birger Jarl and brother of Erik Birgersson, Bengt Birgersson (Benedict) (1254–91), was Duke of Finland in 1284–86.[67] Catillus (Kettil), Bishop of Finland (in office 1266–86), was according to the Chronicle of Bishops in Finland born in Västergötland (Sweden), as well as his predecessors during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, bishops Rodolphus (Rodulfus) and Bero (Björn), Bishop Ragvald being from Östergötland.[68] Therefore it can be assumed that ecclesiastical art was also acquired from other areas than from the Uppsala archbishopric – bishoprics of Skara and Linköping, for example.

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[64] See e.g. Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2009, 120–21.

[65] The question of the potential commissioners of church art in the bishopric of Turku (Åbo) during the late Middle Ages has recently been discussed by Elina Räsänen & Markus Hiekkanen in 'The Kalanti Altarpiece: Its Potential Routes and Prominent Contexts in Medieval Finland', in Ulrike Nürnberger, Elina Räsänen & Uwe Albrecht eds., *Meister Francke Revisited: Auf den Spuren eines Hamburger Malers*, Böckler-Mare-Balticum-Stiftung, Michael Imhof Verlag: Petersberg 2017, 63–78, at 68–73.

[66] According to present theories the construction of the stone church was accomplished in the 1420s or latest to the 1430s during the episcopal reign of Magnus II Tawast. Nevertheless, the church was possibly preceded by several generations of wooden churches, see Markus Hiekkanen, *Suomen keskiajan kivikirkot* (Kirjokansi, 87), Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki: 2014b, 120–21.

[67] On the family ties, see the genealogical tables on the house of Bjälbo in Christian Oertel, *The Cult of St Erik in Medieval Sweden, Veneration of a Royal Saint, Twelfth-Sixteenth Centuries* (Acta Scandinavica, 5), Turnhout: Brepols 2016, 332–33.

[68] Paavali Juusten, *Suomen piispainkronikka*, translation and commentary by Simo Heininen, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 1988, 40–42; Kauko Pirinen, *Turun tuomiokapituli keskiajan lopulla* (Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia, 58), Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura: Helsinki 1956, 35; Juhani Rinne, *Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana, 1., Tuomiokirkon rakennushistoria*, Turun tuomiokirkon isännistö: Turku 1941, 26–28.

If it is presumed that the Nousiainen sculpture presents as saintly king, it is notable, that the iconography of St. Olav of Norway had already become fairly established by the end of the thirteenth century, but the imagery connected to St. Erik was still taking shape. St. Olav was usually depicted as bearded and sitting on a throne, resting his feet on a smaller figure.[69] He was always represented as holding a hammer and often a globular ciborium, his attribute. Erik is more likely to be depicted as beardless, standing, and holding a sword and a sceptre.[70] In addition to their attributes, the images of Erik and Olav can sometimes be distinguished from each other by the colour of their mantles – Erik wears a red mantle whereas St. Olav of Norway wears a blue one.

The Christian iconography and the iconography of saintly kings based on it, was of course not limited only to figurative art. The earliest representations of St. Erik (Erik Jedvardsson) include seals of the ecclesiastical administration.[71] Interestingly, in one of these seals St. Erik is depicted standing, clean-shaven and holding the strap of the mantle with his left hand and a sceptre in his right.[72] But as the example of the saintly king from Roslagsbro, who after finding his hand (holding an axe) was identified as St. Olav, has shown, the culture of depicting saintly kings was manifold and it must have been conducted by the financier and orderer of the sculpture.[73]

It may be too hazardous to suggest that the youthful face of the *Unknown Saint* would belong to St. Erik, but it is plausible that the sculpture depicts a saintly king, rather than a female saint, not to mention the Virgin Mary, as suggested by Nordman. If there was an attribute in the left hand – it may as well have been holding the hem of the mantle – the attribute could have been a rather small and light object. Therefore, a spectre, a sword or a book could be one option, whereas an axe or a liturgical vessel would more likely be held by a hand reaching towards the beholder.

Conclusions

Whereas the technical investigation of the *Unknown Saint* brought up some new information of the inner structure and materials of the sculpture, so too did a new visual and iconographical analysis of the outer form and surface unveil new, exciting details. The multidisciplinary approach contributed to an understanding of the meaning and function of the sculpture, but on the other hand, it did not, due to the fragmented form (the missing parts), allow us to make an exact identification of the depicted saint – the hands with their gestures and the form (hair) of the back of the head would still be crucial from this perspective. The motives and plausible dating for the intentional alteration of the head area of the sculpture will remain open for future discussion. Nevertheless, the results of

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[69] On the iconography of St. Olav, see especially Anne Lidén, Olav den helige i medeltida bildkonst. Legendmotiv och attribut. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien: Stockholm 1999, 210–40.

[70] Bengt Thordeman, 'Erik den helige in medeltidens bildkonst', in Bengt Thordeman ed., Erik den helige. Historia, kultur, reliker, Nordisk rotogravyr: Stockholm 1954, 176.

[71] To mention some examples presented by Thordeman (1954): Seals of the Uppsala chapter (1275 and 1310), of the Dominican convent in Sigtuna (with St. Laurentius 1287) and its prior (1321). Thordeman 1954, 174, illustrations on 178.

[72] The seal dated to 1301 belonged to the guardian of the Franciscan convent of Uppsala. St. Erik is depicted standing side by side with St. Franciscus. For a drawing of the seal by Hans Hildebrand, see Christian Oertel 2016, 122–27.

[73] Jacobsson 2002, 292–94.

the investigation of the *Unknown Saint* address the significance of wooden sculpture as historical and art historical evidence from a period that offers scarcely any other sources in Finland.

The *Unknown Saint* is an early example of gothic, monumental sculpture in Finland. It probably had a special cultic meaning through the relic or relics placed in its head, but also through its acquisition into the church that was the cultic centre of the veneration of St. Henrik. To locate the workshop responsible for the sculpture's making is difficult, primarily because no closely related sculpture can be found in the Scandinavian material. It seems though that the commissioners, if we assume that they had an impact on the form and iconography of the sculpture, may have had been familiar with the sculpture produced in South-Western Sweden, or even with English-influenced or from England imported Norwegian ecclesiastical art. Based on the technical, iconographical and stylistic analyses presented in this article, the sculpture could be dated between 1250 and 1275, rather than the 1270s suggested by Nordman. The sculpture would thus belong to the oldest ecclesiastical sculptures survived in Finland. This would, of course, not support the idea that the saint depicted is St. Erik, because the earliest sculptures presenting him are dated to around 1300. Anyhow, the finding made during the investigation of the *Unknown Saint* may indicate, that the close alliance of relics and devotional images was accepted as a part of the liturgical and devotional culture of the diocese of Åbo (Turku) already when the churches gained their first sculptures of saints.

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